

## For Further information:

Physiotherapy Department  
Gilbert Bain Hospital  
South Road  
Lerwick  
Shetland  
ZE1 0TB

Tel: 01595 743323

**If you need this leaflet in Braille or other languages please contact:**

Corporate Services Department  
Brevik House  
South Road  
Lerwick  
Shetland  
ZE1 0TG

Tel: 01595 743064



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# Myths & Truths About Baby Walkers

**Do they really help?**

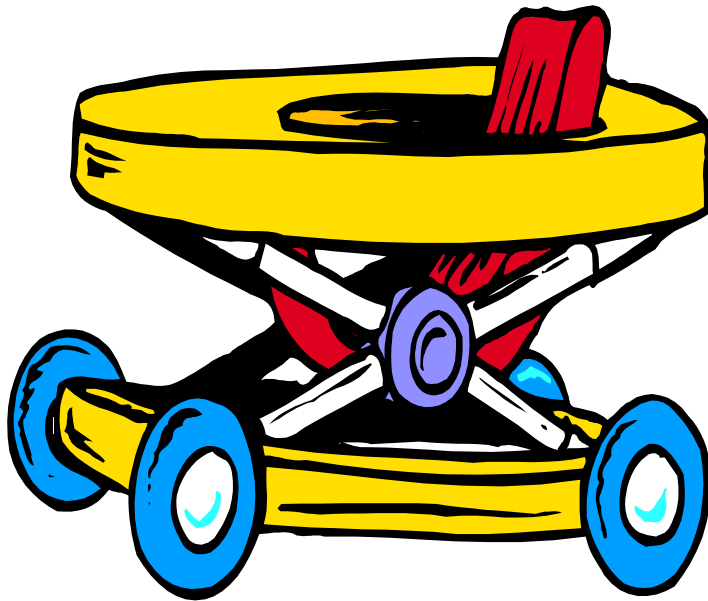
**and**

**Are they really safe?**

**Shetland Children's Physiotherapy Service**

## Why have we made this leaflet?

Each year in Shetland, the physiotherapy service receives numerous referrals for muscle, bone and joint problems that can be directly linked to the use of a baby walker. They can be harmful to a child's safety and development - to such an extent that in April 2007, Canada banned the sale of baby walkers completely. There have also been calls for this to happen in UK however, as yet this has not been done.



The rest of this leaflet is designed to reveal the truths behind the myths and to allow you to make an informed decision as to whether to use a baby walker or not.

## References:

[www.babydevelopmentnews.com/babywalker](http://www.babydevelopmentnews.com/babywalker)

[www.babydevelopmentnews.com/dangersofbabywalkers](http://www.babydevelopmentnews.com/dangersofbabywalkers)

Siegel, A. And Burton, R (1999) Effects of Baby Walkers on Motor and Mental Development in Human Infants *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*

Garrett, M., McElroy, A. And Staines, A (2002) Locomotor milestones and babywalkers: Cross sectional study *British Medical Journal*

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy Campaign 2005

Child Accident Prevention Trust – Baby walkers factsheet

Bayley Assessment — <http://www.pearsonassessments.com/HAIWEB/Cultures/en-us/Productdetail.htm?Pid=015-8027-23X>

## OUR ADVICE

Given enough encouragement and time to develop the muscle strength and balance, all babies will walk when they are ready to (usually between 9-18 months). Time in a baby walker takes away time from activities that produce the real readiness for walking.

Encourage Tummy Time as much as possible – we advise that baby's should sleep on their backs and play on their fronts. Tummy time is the basic building block for all motor skills and a lack of this can have a huge knock on effect.

If you have laminate flooring, then put a large rug or non-slip mat on the floor so that your baby has some grip when they learn to crawl and walk.

Consider getting a stable push-type baby walker when they can stand on their own. If you have laminate floors, it is a good idea to put baby shoes on or keep them in bare feet so they have better grip. Some examples of these are:



If you do decide to use a baby walker:

- Please limit use to 10 minutes a day
- Ensure that your baby is very closely supervised at all times
- Ensure that the walker is low enough that your baby can place both feet completely flat on the floor. If only their toes can touch the floor, please don't use it until your baby grows a bit more.

## THE MYTHS AND TRUTHS REVEALED

**Myth 1 - A baby walker is a safe place to put my baby for a few minutes**

### The Truth:

Putting a baby in a baby walker is like giving a teenager a Ferrari – a dangerous risk.

A child in a baby walker needs much **greater attention and supervision** than if they weren't in one.

Statistics show that over **40% of children who use a baby walker end up getting hurt** (Estimated 4,000 injuries per year in the UK).

They allow babies to move very quickly and raise them to a height where they can reach for hazardous items such as knives or hot drinks.

A Welsh burns unit revealed that **25% of babies aged 6-12 months in hospital with burns and scalds** had been in a baby walker.

## **Myth 2 - Using a baby walker will help my baby to learn to walk**

### **The Truth:**

A paper in the British Medical journal showed that baby walker use was not associated with achieving sitting or standing, and there are strong links between the amount of baby walker use and the extent of developmental delay

If you added up the time your baby is in its walker, **each time it adds up to 24 hours, your baby is likely to be another 3 days later learning to walk and nearly 4 days later learning to stand.**

Because the walker holds them upright, the **child does not learn the proper balance skills needed for walking.**

## **Myth 3 - Using a baby walker will help my baby's development**

### **The Truth:**

Evidence showed that **babies who used a walker sat, crawled and walked later** than those that didn't and also **scored lower on the Bayley Assessment which looks at a child's mental development and language development** as well as Motor skills.

Baby walkers hinder or in severe cases, prevent the child from crawling and keep the child in an upright position which **interferes with the natural brain development of the child.**

The brain works in a criss-cross pattern with the left brain controlling the right arm and leg and the right brain controlling the left arm and leg.

Crawling is an essential activity in encouraging this criss-cross pattern in the brain to develop.

In a walker, babies **lose opportunities to learn important motor and perceptual skills** such as distance and depth, and key concepts such as in/out and on/under.

## **Myth 4 - Using a baby walker will strengthen my baby's legs**

### **The Truth:**

Baby walkers interfere with the natural stance of the child and can **teach the hips and knees to take weight in an abnormal position** – this in turn can lead to **long term changes to child's walking pattern and can sometimes cause long term hip problems.**

Baby walkers teach children to scoot along the floor using their toes and this **strengthens the wrong muscles in the legs.** This can have a big **impact on balance and on general muscle and joint development, including long term foot and ankle problems.**